It's The(ir) Thought That Counts

5/20/73

By Art Buchwald

Capitol Punishment

News item—It has just been revealed that the Committee for the Re-election of the President sent thousands of telegrams to the White House supporting President Nixon's mining of Haiphong Harbor. The White House was then able to claim that the American people were in favor of the action by more than five to one.

"Hello, operator. I wish to send a telegram to the President of the United States at the White House."

"Yessir. Is this to be charged to the Committee for the Re-election of the President?"

"No, dammit, I want it charged to my own telephone number."

"Just a minute, I'm not sure we can do that. If you charge it to the Committee for the Re-election of the President, we can give you a special group rate."

"I'm not interested in a group rate. I want to pay for this telegram in full."

"Well here's the problem, sir. If you charge it through the committee we can assure delivery. But if you send it on your own, it might take several days to get there."

"How's that?"

"The committee picks up the telegrams it sends and delivers them in its own truck. Of course, in order to qualify for this service, you would have to send a telegram *favorable* to the President."

"This telegram does not happen to be favorable to the President."

"Oh, dear that could be sticky for us. The White House refuses to sign a receipt for telegrams that are unfavorable to the President."

"Well I don't care if they sign for it or not. I just want it delivered. Now here's the text."

"Just a minute sir. May I read you several form telegrams? You can send any one of them for 75 cents."

"No I don't want to send a form telegram. Can't I just say what I want to?"

"The Committee for the Re-election of the President won't like that."

"I don't give a hoot about the Committee for the Re-election of the President."

"Well we do. They're our best customers. They send 1,000 telegrams to the White House every day. And they get very annoyed if someone sends one on his own."

"Look, just write down what I have to say."

"The President depends on their telegrams. It lifts his spirit to know the American people are behind him."

"But if all the telegrams are sent by the Committee for the Re-election of the President, how does he know the American people are behind him?"

"The President doesn't know the telegrams come from the Committee for the Re-election of the President, silly."

"But it's been in all the newspapers."

"The President doesn't read the papers. He just reads the telegrams."

"Don't you ever get telegrams from people who don't support the President?"

"Oh, once in a while someone calls in and takes issue with a particular presidential decision."

"What do you do about it?"

"We take his number and report it to the Justice Department."

"What do they do with it?"

"They tap his telephone."

"Maybe I'd better not send this telegram after all."

"That's up to you, sir. After all, it's a free country."

© 1973, Los Angeles Times